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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000475

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: ALIGARH'S MUSLIMS WELCOME US EMBASSY OFFICIALS

Classified By: DepPolCouns Atul Keshap for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: On February 11 Political Officers engaged in a full day of Muslim outreach in the Uttar Pradesh city of Aligarh. The Deputy Political Counselor delivered a well-attended address to students on US - India relations at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) followed by a lunch with community leaders and a roundtable discussion with Muslim intellectuals. The highly engaged students and faculty asked several questions after the talk, generally expressing their displeasure with US policy. The lunch at the Nawab's family seat featured a professional crowd, all of whom were very interested in the US presidential race. At the roundtable discussion, most participants criticized US policy without offering any real solutions. Clearly, the perception that the US is anti-Muslim remains dominant even in intellectual Muslim circles. The business elite voiced the fewest protests, more concerned with their commercial interests than abstract policy debates. End Summary.

Speech on Indo-US Relations  
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12. (U) On February 11 Poloffs traveled to AMU to deliver a speech to students on US - India relations. Founded in 1875 AMU is the oldest Muslim university in India and considered the historic intellectual center for Muslims in South Asia. The Deputy Political Counselor spoke to 150 students and faculty for twenty-five minutes on the current state of the US - India engagement, highlighting the civil nuclear initiative in the context of a deep and broad overall relationship. When the floor was opened for questions, most came in the form of mini-speeches detailing supposed failings of US foreign policy. The civil nuclear initiative, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East peace process all came in for a rhetorical thrashing from students and faculty alike. The attentive crowd was civil throughout -- other than offering applause after each "question" -- but clearly had fixed ideas about US foreign policy. The Deputy Political Counselor offered full rebuttals to each of the questions.

Lunch with Community Leaders  
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13. (U) At a lunch hosted by the local Nawab, local community leaders and businessmen, Poloffs discussed a range of issues.

While US - India relations were mentioned, the US presidential election dominated the conversation. The community leaders were very interested to know Poloffs' thoughts on the Democratic Party primary race and whether an African-American or a woman could actually win a Presidency. The leaders were clearly very engaged in the race, not at all because of any implications it might have to US - India relations, but out of general excitement.

#### Roundtable with Local Muslim Intellectuals

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14. (U) Ending the day of outreach, Poloffs met with a group of Muslim intellectuals. After introductions, the participants took turns explaining the deficiencies of current US policies around the world. Most speakers simply aired grievances rather than suggesting any course of action. Again the group was very hospitable, but the session was designed to end before the Poloffs could offer any substantive response.

#### Anti-US Sentiment Persists

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15. (C) Comment: The speech at AMU had been advertised on campus, and the students were obviously well prepared. After one question about the civil nuclear initiative, US - India relations did not come up again. The remaining questions focused on US actions in the Middle East. Despite the Deputy Political Counselor's forceful defense of US policy, the perception of the students was that US actions were willfully anti-Islamic. The students were more inclined to believe in a clash of civilizations than current stated US policy.

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16. (C) At the roundtable the thinking was more evolved in some aspects and less in others. The consensus was that while US policy may not be anti-Muslim, that was still the perception of many Indian Muslims, thus requiring dialogue. The participants wanted better relations between Muslims and the West. But to accomplish this, most wanted the US to pull out of Iraq and Afghanistan, support Hamas and conclude the Middle East peace process favorably for the Palestinians and outlaw all speech defaming Islam. Still seeing sinister forces at play, one even called for an (another?) inquiry into the "actual" events of September 11. Fed on a diet of conspiracy, the Muslims to whom we spoke may never come around to US thinking, but they appreciated the visit. Just making the five hour trip to Aligarh and listening to them generated a large amount of goodwill and puts a personal face on America for the Muslims of this influential community. End Comment.  
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